

July 11, 2002

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 02-150

Application by the BellSouth Corporation for Authorization Under Section 271 of the Communications Act to Provide In-Region, Interlata Services in the States of Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina

The National Medical Association (NMA) submits these comments in support of BellSouth's application requesting Federal Communications Commission (The Commission) authorization to provide long-distance services in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

The National Medical Association is a 501(c)(3) national professional and scientific organization representing the interests of more than 25,000 physicians and their patients. Established in 1895, the collective body is committed to 1) preventing the diseases, disabilities and adverse health conditions that disproportionately or differentially impact African American and underserved populations, 2) supporting efforts that improve the quality and availability of health care to poor and underserved populations, and 3) increasing the representation and contribution of African Americans in medicine. Toward these ends, the National Medical Association provides educational programs and opportunities for scholarly exchange, conducts outreach efforts to promote improved public health, and establishes national health policy agenda in support of African American physicians and their patients.

BellSouth's entry into the long distance market is important to the medical community because it will bring new and innovative products and services, increased competition, lower prices and increased infrastructure investment for the deployment of advanced technologies.

Advanced telecommunications can expand life enhancing and life saving telemedicine technologies, enhance the quality of healthcare, and promote independent living with people suffering from serious health problems. More competition will provide incentives for the increased infrastructure necessary to bring the full range of advanced telecommunications to all consumers in BellSouth territories especially healthcare providers.

The introduction of these affordable, competitive and innovative plans has been particularly attractive to the low-volume customers who most long distance companies find unattractive. NMA is especially pleased that BellSouth offers choices, such as low rates with no monthly fee and no minimum, special discounts for special customers, and customer assistance to aid its customers in selecting the plan best suited for their needs.

NMA believes the SBC application should be approved on its merits and for its ability to bring reality to the competitive goals of the 1996 Act. Consumers deserve the opportunity of choice for their local, long distance and advanced telephony services. It is not in the public interest to delay or deny for any considerable period of time, the entry of a new and major competitor for long distance services in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

NMA again asserts that the SBC's long distance application should be approved. NMA trusts that the Commission will come to this same conclusion and take positive steps to offer consumers the benefits of competition that the 1996 Act envisioned. The Commission must look at the pro-competitive benefits of SBC's long distance application and quickly approve it.

Reese Stone

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